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SUBJECT: IRAQ'S PRE-ELECTION TRENDS: THE NORTH

REF: A. A. BAGHDAD 415
[B. B. BAGHDAD 440](#)
[C. C. BAGHDAD 369](#)
[D. D. BAGHDAD 382](#)
[E. E. BAGHDAD 454](#)

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: This cable focuses on the northern and north-central provinces of Iraq (Ninewa, Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniah, Kirkuk, Diyala), and Anbar, and serves as a companion piece to earlier reporting on Iraq's southern provinces (ref A). At the end of the first official week of campaigning, a suicide bombing in Anbar and a series of killings in Ninewa's Christian community heightened previously reported concerns about voter intimidation and general security (ref B). These concerns were echoed in conversations with politicians in Diyala, where recent arrests of Sunni politicians have increased tensions in the run-up to elections. In the Kurdistan Region and Kirkuk, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) kicked off the campaign season, stressing the importance of Kurdish rights to parry the encroaching presence of the Goran ("Change") Movement and its criticisms of the two larger Kurdish parties. End Summary.

NORTHWEST: SECURITY CONCERNS LOOM

[1](#)2. (C) A February 1 confrontation involving Kurdish security forces, Ninewa Governor Nujaifi, and U.S. forces, reported ref C, as well as the assassination of Iraqiyya candidate Dr. Soha Abdullah Jarallah in western Mosul on February 7 set the stage for a tense pre-election atmosphere in Ninewa. Yezidi COR MP Amin Farhan related to Poloff that he will remain in Baghdad and not campaign in Ninewa because he is afraid the Kurdish peshmerga will detain him, which will damage his image. Ninewa Provincial Council member Khadaedo Khalif, a Yezidi, shared his view with PRT Ninewa that Iraq cannot withstand additional political turmoil, adding that he appreciates efforts by the UN and the USG to help the GOI hold a transparent election. Further contributing to these tensions, the murders of three Christian shop owners and two Christian students in Ninewa in mid-February threatened to exacerbate sectarian hostilities and caused speculation in the media that the crimes were targeted to intimidate Christian voters. (Comment: There is no credible evidence at this time to directly connect the murders with the elections. End Comment.) In the wake of the February 16 killing of the University of Mosul student, media reports quoted Hazem Girgis, a deacon at an Orthodox Church in Mosul as saying, "The Christian minority has become an issue in the elections, as it always is before the elections".

[1](#)3. (C) In Anbar, security concerns and disputes over the de-Ba'athification of candidates could threaten voter turnout and participation. A suicide bomb attack near Anbar's provincial government building on February 17 reportedly killed at least 13 people and wounded 26. Earlier, two nonviolent demonstrations, held on February 10 and February

14, were conducted in protest of the decision of the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC) to exclude certain candidates and parties from the election. Anbar Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha told Anbar PRT Team Leader in January that he felt that only about 30% would go to the polls and indicated that there were rumors circulating that the GOI would postpone the election. PRT Anbar's informal polling of over 100 people revealed that 40% of these Anbaris remain undecided about voting in the election, and roughly 50% of those among the group who intend to vote planned to do so along tribal lines (ref D).
Qalong tribal lines (ref D).

KIRKUK/KRG: GORAN WILD CARD COLORS CAMPAIGN TRAIL

14. (C) After performing much better than expected against the PUK party in Sulaymaniah during the 2009 Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) elections, the recently established Goran ("Change") Movement has emerged as a potential spoiler in the upcoming March elections. Candidates from the KRG's largest coalitions, the KDP and the PUK, are actively campaigning in Kirkuk and the KRG, emphasizing Kurdish rights and attempting to tamp down Goran's criticisms of incompetence and corruption in the more established Kurdish parties.

15. (C) Nowhere is this challenge from the Goran Movement more evident than in the traditional PUK-stronghold of Kirkuk. In Kirkuk, which has not participated in an election since 2005, the upcoming election's open-list system (i.e., a system in which voters can choose an individual candidate, rather than a party), the Goran Movement's prioritization of implementing Article 140 and a subsequent referendum on Kirkuk's status, as well as enthusiasm for long-awaited elections suggest high voter turnout and an active campaign season in the province. (Note: Kirkuk did not participate in the January 2009 provincial elections. End Note.) KDP politicians appear to be leveraging the lingering debate over Article 140 to make the case that Baghdad will require a nationally known, well-established political presence advocating for Kirkukis, as opposed to the inexperienced newcomers from Goran. KDP COR MP Sartee Kakai told Poloff that he is coordinating his campaign schedule with the local KDP chapter in Kirkuk and emphasizing that the KDP is the only party that looks out for minorities. KDP and PUK leaders are arguing that the fight for Kirkuk will happen after the elections, and why the Kurds are better off sending experienced politicians to Baghdad to lead the fight for Kirkuk.

16. (C) To counter the expected Goran surge, PUK leaders in Baghdad are also striving to adapt their message and tactics at the national level. PUK COR Bloc leader Friad Rwanduzi said that he is meeting with different groups of people than in previous years, playing on the Kurds' desire for a voice in Baghdad to advocate for Kurdish rights. He added that he tells these groups that he knows how to work the Baghdad political machine and that it is important to have experienced people working at the national parliamentary level to get what the Kurds need for stability and prosperity in the KRG. PUK Council Member Aram Yarwessi said that 80 PUK Council members have been mobilized to campaign in their particular geographic areas and coordinate with the national captain. He stated that there is a difference of opinion about how to campaign since the older generation is only worried about talking to PUK members and "guaranteeing their loyalty." Yarwessi elaborated that younger members want to target fence-sitters and/or non-Kurdish Alliance List (KAL), which includes the KDP and the PUK, loyalists to convince them to vote KAL based on a platform of issues that includes the delivery of services, responsiveness to citizens, and transparency.

DIYALA: COMPLEX VARIABLES AT PLAY

17. (C) Pervasive security concerns and the recent arrests of Sunni leaders (ref E) could affect political campaigning in Diyala, though Diyala Municipality manager Sab'a Talub Lateef told PRT Diyala that he believes an expected nationwide curfew on election day will mitigate disruptions. Diyala political candidate Baquba Qaim Maqam Abdullah told the PRT that his campaign consists of walking the streets, handing out cards, and installing the occasional road poster. He stated that his "worries" during the campaign are focused on the GOI, elaborating that Maliki's government is "settling scores" and that "it is easy to get arrested and spend a year in jail." This alleged score-settling has played into broader perceptions among Abdullah's constituency of the growing disenfranchisement of Sunnis in Diyala. A more elusive, but nonetheless persistent concern felt by Diyala's Sunni candidates is the influence in the province exerted by Iran, situated just across the border.

18. (C) A Diyala PRTOff noted a more vibrant pre-election environment in the province, observing Goran posters and a 50-vehicle campaign rally in Khanaqin on the first day of campaigning. Kurdish coalitions appear to be rallying in force in Khanaqin, a majority Kurdish district of Diyala that is also home to a significant number of Arab families. PRT Diyala observed hundreds of people at a large, joint QDiyala observed hundreds of people at a large, joint (PUK-KDP, socialist, communist, Islamist) Kurdish Alliance political rally in Khanaqin. PRT observers noted that the PUK's Mullah Muktiar, who spoke at the rally, conveyed a message that the KRG includes Khanaqin, while another speaker noted, in Arabic, that the Kurdish Alliance would represent all Diyala groups, including Arabs and Turkomen. Diyala Governor Abd Al Nasr Mahdawi (Iraq Islamist Party) sat next to Kurdish leaders at the rally, illustrating an unusual association between IIP and Kurdish parties in the area that fits the unique demographic and geographic character of Khanaqin district.

19. (C) COMMENT: Security conditions in Iraq's northern and north-central provinces remain in a state of flux. An uptick in terrorist attacks targeting government entities and personnel, as well as politically-motivated violence against candidates, parties, and minorities, could increase tensions significantly in the campaigns in Ninewa and Anbar. The symbolism of the March elections as a test of reconciliation provides a compelling backdrop for targeted political campaigning efforts by politicians who are committed to furthering these reconciliation efforts, or for targeted violence by elements that oppose reconciliation. While those provinces grapple with maintaining voter confidence in security, intense campaigning by Kurdish entities in the KRG, and Kurdish and Arab parties in Kirkuk and Diyala, also herald an increasingly dynamic political contest. Campaign battlegrounds such as Kirkuk and the Khanaqin district in Diyala will be particularly important testing grounds for entities such as the Goran Movement to prove themselves and garner support by appealing to new, as well as jaded, voters. Goran's ability to leverage such opportunities may exert a long-term effect on the strained PUK-KDP alliance. END COMMENT.
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